

TESTIMONY TO THE MICHIGAN SENATE  
AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE ON SENATE BILL 307-310

Dennis Fijalkowski, Executive Director, Michigan Wildlife Conservancy (517-641-7677)

The Michigan Wildlife Conservancy urges you to reject Senate Bills 307-310 and let stand the state order prohibiting possession of live wild hogs that is scheduled to go into effect on July 8, 2011. We also ask you to reject any other attempts to weaken the state order.

The Wildlife Conservancy has conducted a wide variety of projects for fish and wildlife in Michigan since 1982, and has been involved in research, education, and removal efforts focused on wild hogs for seven years. Our staff has observed the damage wild hogs do in several U.S. states and on four continents. All we have learned tells us that wild hogs are a huge threat to the agricultural and natural resources of our state. That's why we are active in the Coalition To Preserve Michigan Agriculture and Natural Resources and are determined to see the faucet leaking wild hogs in Michigan turned off.

Michigan has long suffered problems caused by exotic species such as the sea lamprey, gypsy moth, emerald ash borer, giant reed grass, and zebra mussel. Conservationists wish our government could have kept such exotics out of Michigan, but relatively few people recognized the potential pathways by which such species invaded, nor the problems they might cause.

Our state and you as legislators have no excuses with the wild hog, perhaps the ultimate invasive exotic species. The wild hog's destructiveness has been documented around the globe. Estimated damages to crops, livestock, and natural resources from wild hogs top \$1.5 billion annually in the U.S. alone. Wild hogs kill livestock and wildlife ranging from birds to deer fawns. In some areas of Michigan they are destroying 10 percent or more of crops every year. Wild hogs can carry pseudorabies, a disease potentially devastating to our pork industry which generates half a billion dollars annually. Michigan could eventually be like Texas, where hogs cause \$400 million in damages each year, and suffer enormous property losses to wild hogs. And this exotic species did not sneak into our state via ballast water in ships, jumping dams or any other hard-to-track means. Rather, wild hogs arrived in stock trailers being brought right up I-75 and our other highways and bound for game ranches and breeding facilities. This is outrageous.

The wild hog poses a threat to Michigan that is just as serious as the threat of Asian carp to the Great Lakes. Would any of you vote to try to regulate possession of Asian carp at fish farming operations? We trust you would want a ban in effect.

Several other states have banned possession of live wild hogs. Oregon has not only made it illegal to import or keep wild hogs, but requires landowners to contact state officials within 10

days of discovering wild hogs on their land. Our state's wildlife biologists have been advised, repeatedly, by out-of-state experts to pull out all the stops to keep wild hogs out of Michigan and eliminate those already on the loose.

The Michigan Wildlife Conservancy trains volunteers to detect and trap wild hogs through its Michigan Wild Hog Removal Program. This is a partnership between the Conservancy and the U.S. Department of Agriculture with support from non-profit groups such as the Michigan Pork Producers Association and the Michigan Forest Association. Through this program, we have learned from landowners and other citizens that wild hogs are still escaping from some game ranches- it is not a thing of the past as game ranch industry representatives contend. One volunteer trapped and/or shot nine wild hogs since last September on a 38-acre property located about four miles from a Mecosta County game ranch, that offers feral hog hunts, and in fall of 2009 an owner of land in Dickinson County just three miles from a game ranch shot a wild hog with ear tag number 18. So, the source of our problem is clear.

In 2008, when pseudorabies was detected in free-roaming wild hogs in Saginaw County and in wild hogs at four facilities, subsequent actions by state agencies resulted in costs to taxpayers of about \$415,000. More than \$40,000 was paid to reimburse game ranch owners for wild hogs the state had to destroy.

State agencies estimate it would cost \$750,000 per year to regulate and monitor wild hogs and the diseases they carry if the legislature passes some version of Senate Bills 307-310. Incredibly, your committee is being asked to forward legislation based on the hope that it might not cost that much, and the hope that the cumbersome and difficult to enforce regulations might stop future escapes, and the hope that fences can somehow stop pathogens like pseudorabies. Hope is not an acceptable basis for wild hog control in Michigan. The only responsible action the Michigan Legislature can take is to let the ban called for by Public Act 451 to stand. You must protect the jobs and environment of future generations of Michigan citizens.